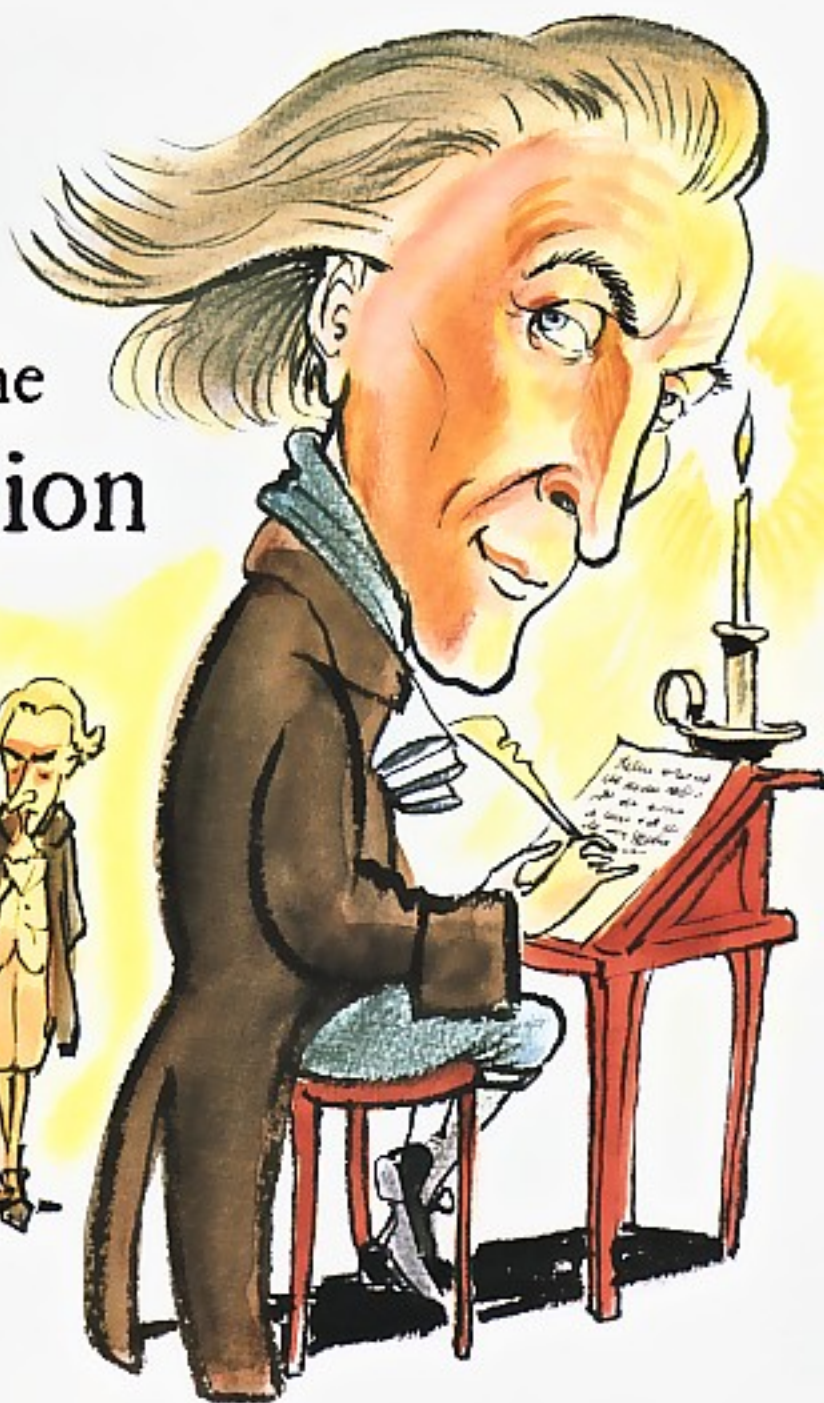




NEWBERY HONOR-WINNING AUTHOR

JEAN ★ FRITZ

Shh!
We're writing the
Constitution





After the Revolutionary War most people in America were glad that they were no longer British. Still, they were not ready to call themselves Americans. The last thing they wanted was to become a nation. They were citizens of their own separate states, just as they had always been: each state different, each state proud of its own character, each state quick to poke fun at other states. To Southerners, New Englanders might be “no-account Yankees.” To New Englanders, Pennsylvanians might be “lousy Buckskins.” But to everyone the states themselves were all important. “Sovereign states,” they called them. They loved the sound of “sovereign” because it meant that they were their own bosses.

George Washington, however, scoffed at the idea of “sovereign states.” He knew that the states could not be truly independent for long and survive. Ever since the Declaration of Independence had been signed, people had referred to the country as the United States of America. It was about time, he thought, for them to act and feel united.

Once during the war Washington had decided it would be a good idea if his troops swore allegiance to the United States. As a start, he lined up some troops from New Jersey and asked them to take such an oath. They looked at Washington as if he'd taken leave of his senses. How could they do that? they cried. New Jersey was their country!



So Washington dropped the idea. In time, he hoped, the states would see that they needed to become one nation, united under a strong central government.

But that time would be long in coming. For now, as they started out on their independence, the thirteen states were satisfied to be what they called a federation, a kind of voluntary league of states. In other words, each state legislature sent delegates to a Continental Congress which was supposed to act on matters of common concern.

In September 1774, when the First Continental Congress met, the common concern was Great Britain. Two years later, after the Declaration of Independence had been signed, the concern was that the country needed some kind of government. Not a fully developed government because of course they had their states. All they wanted were some basic rules to hold them together to do whatever needed to be done. So the Congress wrote the Articles of Confederation which outlined rules for a "firm league of friendship." In practice, however, the states did not always feel a firm need to follow any rules.

The Congress, for instance, could ask the states to contribute money to pay the country's debts, but if the states didn't feel like contributing, no one could make them. Congress could declare war but it couldn't fight unless the states felt like supplying soldiers. The trouble was that their president had no definite powers and the country had no overall legal system. So although the Congress could make all the rules it wanted, it couldn't enforce any of them. Much of the time the states didn't even bother to send delegates to the meetings.

By 1786, it was becoming obvious that changes were needed. People were in debt, a few states were printing paper money that was all but worthless, and in the midst of this disorder some people could see that America would fall apart if it didn't have a sound central government with power to act for all the states. George Washington, of course, was one who had felt strongly about this for a long time. Alexander Hamilton was another. Born and brought up in the Caribbean Islands, he had

NEWBERY HONOR-WINNING AUTHOR **JEAN FRITZ**
brings history to life with her engaging biographies focusing on pivotal figures
and events in America's history—together with wonderful interior illustrations
by Tomie dePaola and a cover by Caldecott Medal winner David Small.

It's the summer of 1787, and it's hot! Fifty-five delegates from thirteen states
have huddled together in the strictest secrecy in the Philadelphia State House to
write the **CONSTITUTION** of the United States. But these men—a
mix of some of the greatest patriots of the Revolutionary War—can't agree on
much. And not only do they have problems getting along, they can't even sit
comfortably and open a window in the overwhelming heat for fear of spies!

Jean Fritz's entertaining, and historically accurate, account includes many
little-known facts about the summer our Founding Fathers came together to
overcome their differences and write this nation's Constitution.

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★ "An energetic, good-humored history lesson." —*Booklist*, starred review

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